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Letter dated 23 February 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of a statement issued by the Government of Sierra Leone on 23 February 2001, concerning the question of sanctions against Liberia (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council

(*Signed*) Ibrahim M. **Kamara**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 23 February 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING

GOVERNMENT STATEMENT ON UNITED NATIONS SANCTIONS AGAINST LIBERIA

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 23, 2001

It is now almost a month since the United Nations Security Council discussed the report and recommendations of the UN Panel of Experts set up last year to make an in-depth study of the role of diamonds in fuelling the armed conflict in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone participated in that discussion, concurred with the findings of the Panel, and endorsed its recommendation that the Security Council impose sanctions against Liberia for actively supporting the RUF at all levels, in providing military training, weapons, logistical support, staging ground for attacks and a safe haven for RUF retreat and recuperation.

It is now almost two weeks since the Council and an ECOWAS Ministerial delegation met privately in New York to consider the question of imposing a series of sanctions against Liberia. While there was overwhelming support for sanctions, there was a feeling that such measures should be delayed for at least two months to allow the Government of Liberia to comply with a number of commitments it had made to ECOWAS to address the problems

The Government of Sierra Leone took note of the views expressed by both sides in the discussion, and looked forward to the Council's formal response to the ECOWAS request.

Conscious of the need to muster the widest possible support among members of the UN Security Council for the proposed sanctions, the Government of Sierra Leone was even prepared to consider a compromise, namely, that should the Council decide to adopt a draft resolution on sanctions against Liberia immediately, but to have it take effect two months thereafter, Sierra Leone would go along with such a course of action.

However, the Government of Sierra Leone has since come to the conclusion that the basis on which ECOWAS had advocated a two-month delay in the application of sanctions is gradually being eroded by the Liberian Government itself. First of all the least that the Government of Liberia could have done to strengthen the credibility of ECOWAS, and to justify the proposed two-month delay, was to have taken immediate and verifiable action within these two weeks, to fulfill some of those basic commitments that did not require technical or financial assistance from any international organization. It has failed for instance, to show proof and independent verification of the steps it claims it has taken to "disengage" itself from the RUF. It continues to harbor senior members of the RUF and their families. It continues to violate the arms embargo imposed by resolution 788 (1992); the provisions on the sale or supply of arms and related materiel imposed by resolution 1171 (1998); as well as its obligations under the ECOWAS Moratorium on arms imports.

The Government of Liberia is also gradually eroding the credibility of ECOWAS by demonstrating a lack of understanding of the seriousness of the situation and its implications for peace and stability in the West African sub-region, including Liberia itself.

Thirdly, and the most disturbing aspect of the situation is that Liberian Government continues to demonstrate through complacency and delaying tactics its belief that the Security Council is incapable of taking any action against that Government without the concurrence of ECOWAS. This belief is at the core of the whole question of whether or not the imposition of sanctions should be delayed.

It is the view of the Government of Sierra Leone that the Security Council should without further delay take up this serious challenge to its responsibility under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Sierra Leone Government is convinced now more than ever before, that at the end of any two-month delay in the Security Council's consideration of sanctions, Liberia plans to request the Council through ECOWAS, to allow it more time to comply with the ECOWAS commitments. It would also argue that it lacks the financial and technical resources to comply with the commitments it made with ECOWAS.

While the Government of Sierra Leone is fully aware of the emerging international consensus that in imposing sanctions the Security Council

should ensure, among other things, that such measures do not create unbearable humanitarian consequences, it is the view of the Government that this is no longer a convincing argument in the case of the scope of sanctions now under consideration for Liberia. In deciding on nature, scope and timing of sanctions against Liberia, the Council should take into consideration the following:

- All member states of ECOWAS support the imposition of sanctions against Liberia. As the current Chairman of ECOWAS, President Alpha Konare of Mali told the Millennium Summit meeting of the Security Council, "sanctions form part of the means by which the Organization can take action. They must be adapted to their specific goals...The recent sanctions relating to the illicit exploitation of natural resources demonstrate how much more effective targeted sanctions can be."(S/PV.4194)

- No member of ECOWAS has argued that the proposed sanctions against Liberia would create serious humanitarian consequences for the people of Liberia. On the contrary, the people of Liberia have openly supported adoption of the sanctions resolution on their country and cited the fact that only a handful of people who have been identified in the sanctions committee report benefit directly from the privileges that will be suspended by the sanctions resolution.

- Inaction by the Security Council against Liberia has in effect not only contributed to the prolongation of the conflict, but execrated the humanitarian crisis that has overwhelmed the people in Sierra Leone for almost ten years.

- The gravity of the crisis and its impact on neighbouring countries, particularly Guinea, are on the records of UNICEF, UNHCR, OCHA and other international organizations and agencies. As the representative of Mauritius vividly described it, when one reads the report of the UN Panel of Experts on diamonds and arms in Sierra Leone, "...the image that comes to mind is that of numerous children, women and men who have suffered cruel death or have been severely maimed and disabled in the senseless conflict that has gripped Sierra Leone for several years.. It is indeed outrageous that the lives of so many innocent Sierra Leonean children, women and men, have been extinguished and so many others have been condemned to live miserably for ever with vital limbs cut off

simply because a powerful few have entertained a sinister dream to amass unlimited wealth through illegitimate means." (S/PV.4264)

- A week ago UNICEF reported that the RUF was still holding 500 children; that some 10,000 children have lost contact with their families, while over 1,000 girls had become victims of rape. These and other human conditions were certainly not the consequences of sanctions.

- The people of Sierra Leone bore the brunt of sanctions imposed by ECOWAS in 1997 against the military/rebel junta with the blessing of the Security Council.

- The people of Sierra Leone are already feeling the negative effects of the ban on the export of Sierra Leone diamonds under resolution 1306 (2000). They are however aware that the ban would, in the near future, help to break the link between the trade in diamonds and arms, and contribute to ending the rebel war.

The Government of Sierra Leone would therefore like to appeal to the Security Council to alleviate the suffering of the people of Sierra Leone, and prevent further deterioration of the current humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone and in the neighbouring countries, by taking a decision as expeditiously as possible, to impose sanctions against Liberia based on the findings and recommendations of its Panel of Experts on diamonds and arms.